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SUBJECT: SERBIAN LEADERS RALLY SUPPORT FOR REPUBLIKA SRBSKA KIN

Summary

1. (U) With the dissolution of the Serbian-Montenegrin Union in the recent past and the independence of Kosovo around the corner, Serbia has seized on political events in Bosnia's Republika Srpska as an opportunity to proclaim support for the interests of Serbs region-wide. Serbia's political leaders responded swiftly, publicly, and sharply to the reports about new procedural rules that Bosnia's High Representative Miroslav Lajcak introduced. Media has dedicated considerable space and airtime to covering the events in Republika Srpska and local reactions. In discussions about Kosovo and Republika Srpska, Serbia's leaders argue moral and legal high ground for preserving current status and laws that, they believe, favor Serbs' rights or Serbia's territory. End Summary.

Defending Dayton

2. (U) Reacting to High Representative Lajcak's introduction of three new measures ostensibly intended to stabilize and develop Bosnia's democratic institutions, PM Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) on October 23 characterized the OHR's reform measures as attempts "brutally to abolish Republika Srpska." Kostunica's media advisor Srdjan Djuric called on Lajcak to rescind the measures or resign. Interior Minister and DSS Deputy Chair Dragan Jovic assigned Lajcak blame, in advance, should relations in Bosnia worsen because of the HR's "efforts to dismantle" the Serb republic.

3. (U) Although local press reported on October 23 that the meeting between Lajcak and RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik diffused tensions in the province, if only temporarily, Serbian leaders were slow to put down the gauntlet. Prime Minister Kostunica, October 24, accused Bosnia's High Representative (HR) Miroslav Lajcak of implementing "policies of force" that would disadvantage ethnic Serbs in Bosnia's Republika Srpska (RS). Kostunica told the press that Lajcak sought to amend agreements reached under the Dayton Peace Accords.

4. (U) Media reported that President Boris Tadic, in a more modulated message, urged Lajcak "to reconsider" the new measures. "The voice of the Republika Srpska must be heard and respected," Tadic's statement read, "because the Dayton Accords stipulate that a change ... must be endorsed by consensus of all three constituent nations." Arguing that the new laws disadvantaged RS Serbs, the president noted that, under Dayton, no decisions could be taken "to the detriment of any one constituent nation." Diffusing concern that he advocated RS independence, Tadic noted "respect for the territorial integrity of all countries...[including] Bosnia."

Media Coverage

5. (U) Serbian print and broadcast news outlets covered the exchanges between Belgrade and Bosnia, throughout the week. On October 29, all papers ran articles and photos of demonstrations in

RS, and the daily Politika featured a photo of a marcher carrying a placard bearing a larger-than-life image of Russian PM Putin. Extensive media coverage came at an unexpected price, however. October 28, the DSS spokesperson threatened to cease doing business with B92 radio and television outlet for giving airtime to Zeljko Kosmic, BiH presidency member, who had reportedly chided Kostunica for interfering in Bosnian affairs and had threatened to "wrap [the prime minister's] knuckles."

¶6. (U) Serbian politicians explicitly linked events in RS and Kosovo. Kostunica identified the "preservation" of Kosovo and Republika Srpska as political priorities, and argued that international agreements protecting the status of each were in jeopardy. "Lajcak's measures have as a goal the abolishing of Resolution 1244 and the Dayton Agreement, i.e. the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence and the abolishing of RS." Serbia's Socialist Party, going further, issued a statement calling on Serbia to recognize an independent Republika Srpska, should Kosovo claim independence.

Comment

¶7. (U) While some GOS officials may nostalgically pine for the days when Serbs dominated a united Yugoslavia, Belgrade's attention to RS does not necessarily signal interest in joining all Serbs under one roof. Rather, unfortunate timing of the events in Bosnia provided an opportunity to spin the story to depict Serbia alone in a hostile neighborhood, with little support (except from Russia), and to paint international supervisors in Bosnia and Kosovo as mavericks, with little respect for the international agreement, and less for Serbs. We expect this theme to reverberate in the weeks leading to the end of Kosovo negotiations and to presidential elections. End Comment.

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